WHIRRAKEE

April 2007 Vol. 28 No. 3

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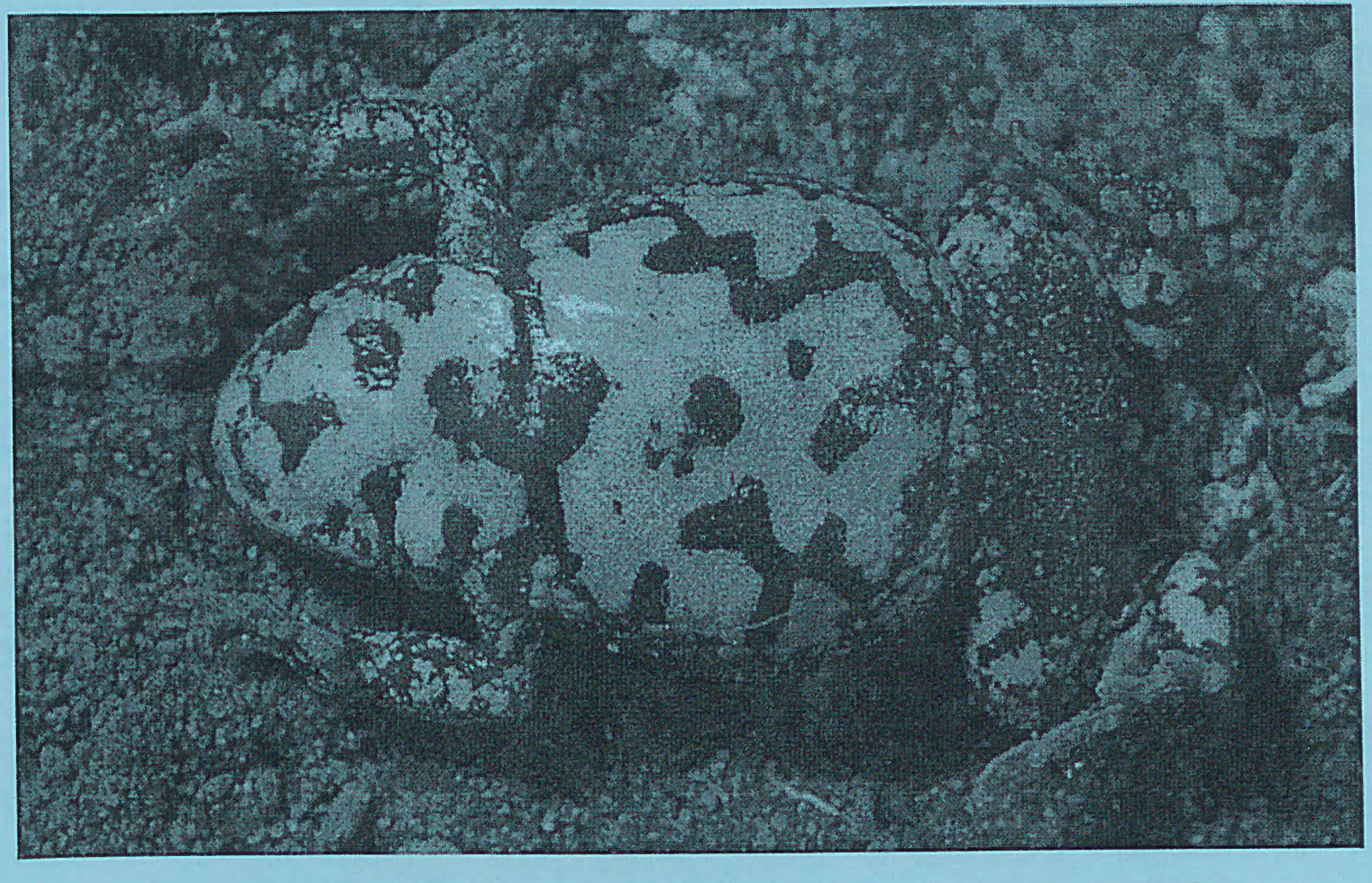

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.
Address for correspondence: PO Box 396, Bendigo 3552
ISSN 0812-423X

Office Bearers for 2006 - 2007

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Junior Vice President	Anne Bridley		5449 3479.
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Syllabus organiser	Rod Orr	2 Cockerel Court, Bendigo	5443 5668
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Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $34; Family $40; Concession: Single $28.50; Family $34. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $34.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The invited speaker at general meetings starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper.
If a workshop is held prior to the meeting, it will be advertised and it usually starts at 7.00pm.
The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 7:30pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearer listed above and the following members: Matthew Comer, Bill Holsworth, Darren White, Bob Ruddick, Rod Orr, Jan Orr, Peter Ellis, Ben Goonan, Richard Goonan, Anthony Sheean, Liz Graham

Excursions are conducted regularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. In addition to local excursions, campouts are held several times each year, usually coinciding with long weekends or holiday periods.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club has one active group that meets regularly (the Fauna Study Group) and other groups that meet at irregular intervals.

Fauna Study Group: meets on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7:30pm in the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building.
Chairman: John Burtonclay, Fadersons Lane, Mandurang (5439 5710)
Secretary: Bill Holsworth, 13 Nabilla Crs., Bendigo (5443 4063)
Equipment Officer: Maurie Lewis (0407 427179)

Bird Observers Group: This group has field excursions and the occasional lecture evening. Please consult the *Whirrakee* for details. Special bird observations should be reported to Anne Bridley 5449 3479.
To propose meetings or excursions please contact Kerrie Norris 5447 8017.

Front cover photo?...see page 2.

WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club

Vol. 28, No. 3, April 2007

Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*) which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

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Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles. Contributions will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although articles received more than one week after the monthly General Meeting will probably be too late for inclusion in the next issue of *Whirrakee*.
Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editor's Note:
It is nice to see some more field natty articles in this edition and the idea with the new general meeting segment 'things of the night' is also excellent.

Front Page Illustration – Photographer unknown…please let me know if you know him or her.

At the March general meeting, Leigh Mitchell talked about one of the vanishing frog species in our region, Bibron's toadlet. This is one of the species, the frog monitoring program is concentrating on (the other is the growling grass frog). Bibron's toadlet turns itself over when startled, so the belly (which is more distinctive anyway) is shown here. For its 'normal' look, see the article on page 6.

Short notices

April Excursion

This excursion will go to the Barmah Forest, where we'll be looking at birds, plants and the Murray River wetlands in general.
Departure time is 7.00am from the Club rooms and approximate return time is 3.00pm. Bring drinks, snacks, your lunch and protective clothing.
The cost (if any) had not been determined, so please ring Richard Goonan on 0423418815 or e-mail him on richardgoonan@optusnet.com.au for further information on transport.

Exploding kangaroos at Ballarat?

Date: 27th April 2007
Time: 12:00 - 1:30
Venue: F301, Mt Helen Campus, University of Ballarat

We take great pleasure in inviting you to the seminar to be conducted jointly by the Centre for Environmental Management, University of Ballarat and Department of Sustainability and Environment. The speaker at the seminar will be Dr. Graeme Coulson, The University of Melbourne. Graeme will be speaking on "Exploding kangaroos! Defining problems, setting targets and choosing management options".

Please visit the web for information (there is a link to a seminar flyer on this page):
http://www.ballarat.edu.au/ard/sci-eng/biodiversity_conf/seminar.shtml

Please RSVP on or before 16th April. A light lunch will be provided so could you please ensure that you RSVP.

Two items of Natural History of Bendigo

via Bill Holsworth

Note from the newspaper ***Bendigo Mercury,*** **8 June 1859**

VORACITY OF THE NATIVE CAT. – a novel instance of the voracity of this curious little animal occurred a few nights since. Mounted Constable Sunderland, of the Campaspe station, having been frequently annoyed by the predatory descents of some petty thief on his larder, set a small steel fall for the purpose of catching the intruder, which he fastened to a stake with a strip of cowhide. On the following morning the thong was gnawed through, and the trap gone. Not to be outdone, hoverer, a second trap was set, and this time it was secured by a small iron chain. The next morning a rather singular sight presented itself; a native cat was caught by the neck and upon one of its feet was fastened the trap lost on the previous night, with the remainder of the thong still attached.

Note in the ***Bendigo Advertiser*** **-Tuesday 12 August 1862**

"We are informed that there is at present in Sandhurst a celebrated French naturalist, with a party of six men collecting specimens for the French Government. Three of the party are "dead shots", and the remainder are the stuffers and dressers of the specimens secured. The party have already killed and prepared an immense number of birds of various kinds."
Here is an opportunity for members to track down the details of the collecting party and discover what specimens they found in Bendigo (=Sandhurst) in 1862.

An unusual nesting record

by Fred Watts

A pair of New Holland Honeyeaters chose a Christmas wreath in which to build a nest and raise two young, last October, at the home of Inglewood resident Bob Grundy. The wreath is placed high on the wall on the back verandah, the nest is not visible, built in the top of the wreath, except for a few pieces of long nesting material.
Bob has a large garden with many shrubs, but evidently the colourful wreath appealed to the birds more.
We wonder if the birds will nest there again this spring?

Birds in Magpie Street

By Clive Fisher

I had never seen any Indian mynahs in my yard until they moved into my neighbourhood in January, and they are still here. In the last couple of weeks I have had black-headed butcherbirds in my yard, and yesterday a flock of New Holland honeyeaters were in my eucalypt.

NEW: Things of the Night

by Sabine Wilkens

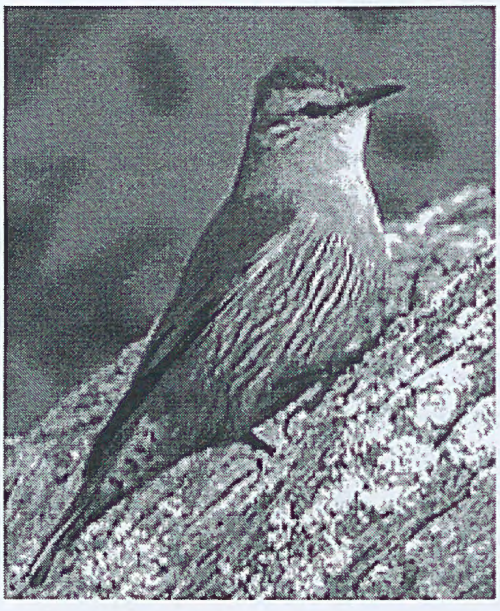
At the March general meeting, Glenise Moors introduced this new segment which is to become a regular item at the general meetings from now on.
You might be forgiven to think that this segment will deal with a nocturnal creature each month. I thought so too, but I was soon put on the right track. The idea is, that this segment will deal with some more traditional field natty things. This is an aspect of the club that some members feel has lost a bit of ground amongst all the other important activities, like writing submissions and getting involved in political or educational or other conservation issues.

To christen this new segment, the president herself, Glenise Moors took the stage and explained about two local bird species, the white throated treecreeper (*Cormobates leucophaeus)* and the brown treecreeper (*Climacteris picumnus).*
In her talk, the idea was to highlight the differences and the similarities between these two birds.
The two illustrations below are from the 'Birds in Backyards' webpage. This can be found at: http://birdsinbackyards.net/

White throated tree creeper
(Photo by K Vang and W Dabrowka / Bird Explorers)

The two birds species occupy slightly different regions, the white throated treecreeper being more common in damper areas on the eastern

side of the Great Dividing Range, while the brown one also occurs further inland.



Brown treecreeper
(Photo by K Vang and W Dabrowka /Bird Explorers)

Other differences are behavioural, i.e. the white throated treecreeer spends about 1% of its time on the ground foraging, while the brown treecreeper spends about 50% of its time on the ground Other than ants, both birds' main diet, they also eat beetle larvae spiders etc. Both birds try and get these insect out of tree trunks and rock crevices They both nest in natural hollows lined with fur, moss and other soft material.

In spite of their name, the two species are not very closely related. The white throated treecreeper spends 22 day to incubate its eggs, while the Brown one only needs 16 days along with all other treecreepers.

Another interesting difference between the two species is that the brown treecreeper displays communal breeding behaviour, something quite common in Australian birds. There are up to five in a group with up to three helpers that assist the breeding pair.

Glenise has the brown treecreeper at her place in South Mandurang and she commented on the fact that it spends a lot of times on dead timber and ant heaps.

As part of the presentation, we were treated to the sounds of these birds as well.

The audience was very approving of this new component of the night. If anybody has anything to show and talk about, particularly a comparison between two species or habitats or something, please let somebody from the committee know.

March General Meeting
Frog Monitoring Program, speaker: Leigh Mitchell

Author: Sabine Wilkens

The very enthusiastic speaker of the night was Leigh Mitchell, coordinator of the Waterwatch program on frog conservation (North Central Frog Identification and monitoring program). Leigh is a very talented imitator of frog noises and the added audio-component to the talk made it a lot more interesting.

The aim of the monitoring program is to raise community awareness of local frogs, increase community knowledge and identification skills, and generally increase an understanding about frog biology and distribution

'Water Watch' is a nation-wide water quality monitoring program. Within Victoria, there are nine different programs going, one of which is the frog program. It runs in a couple of other regions and has already been highly successful in Melbourne.

In his presentation, Leigh focussed on frogs of the Box-ironbark forest, but occasionally a foreigner slipped in.

Frogs are very variable in appearance, which makes identification from morphological features quite difficult. Most species are best identified by their call. To aid identification by community members, training is provided to use the sound recording system and in general identification skills.

The sounds to record are advertisement calls. Frogs do make other calls but these are generally distress calls or, as Leigh put it, the 'hang-on-a-second-you've-got-the wrong frog'- calls.
If you want to hear some example calls, you can do so for most frog species at the wonderful and colourful website: frogs.org.au (then go to 'frogs of Australia' and there are regional guides).

When a sound recording is sent in by a community member, it is sent away to be checked by experts unless there is no doubt abut the identification.

The training also includes the provision of identification material. This material is also available on the web on the Vic Waterwatch website under 'regional monitoring programs'. Please visit the website below to view these resources.
http://www.vic.waterwatch.org.au/inform.php?a=7&b=625&c=626

The North Central Waterwatch Frog Identification and Monitoring program will be smaller than Melbourne's, but surveys will run all year around.
Spring is however the major calling time

Two rare frogs are focussed on, the Growling Grass frog and Bibron's toadlet.
Some exciting news is that a new population of Growling Grass Frog has only recently been discovered in a Murrabit irrigation channel

The rest of the presentation was a catalogue of our frogs of the North Central region:

First the froglets...
The eastern froglet or common froglet, *Crinia signifiera.* is a very common, polymorphic species that is very tolerant.of varying environmental conditions.
Its skin is blotched and the belly is black and white. It calls in the water. This is different from many other frogs and in particular the plains froglet.

The Plains froglet, *Crinia parinsignifera* is also a common frog, sometimes similar to the eastern froglet but this one's belly is grey with dark flanks and it calls from the edge of the water
This species has also been called the squashed duck frog due to its peculiar call, which sounds as if you have just stepped on a duck (!).
Both species of *Crinia* were heard calling fm Axe creek not too long ago.

Then the tree frogs...
They can often be differentiated by their toe pads.
Litoria ewingi, the southern brown tree frog attaches its egg mass to grasses and twigs.
There are many records of this frog from the Maldon area. They are popular as pets because they are so active.
Their call is pulsing (a bit like the white-throated treecreeper!)
A related frog, the whistling tree frog, *Litoria verreauxi* is not really found in this area.
To distinguish them, you have to get close up. The southern brown tree frog has toe disks that are slightly wider than the toe itself, whereas in the whistling tree frog, the toe disks are not really any wider than the toes themselves.

Litoria peroni, Peron's tree frog
This frog is often found on windows and it has a most peculiar call. It is also called the maniacal cackle frog and that gives some hint as to what it sounds like. Its distinguishing feature is its cross shaped pupil (its pupil was illustrated on the front cover of the *Whirrakee* some time ago)
This frog is generally associated with larger river and billabongs.
It is easier to study than most frogs as it will sit on your hand, seemingly less nervous than other frog species
They call from the edge of the water

The rocky river frog, *Litoria lesueuri*
This is a riverine species, its tadpoles only develop in a river. They have an oral disk and this helps them feed in a moving river (most of our frogs however, don't like rivers).
This is a sexually dimorphic species with the smaller males change to yellow during the breeding season. They generally only occur south of My Macedon.

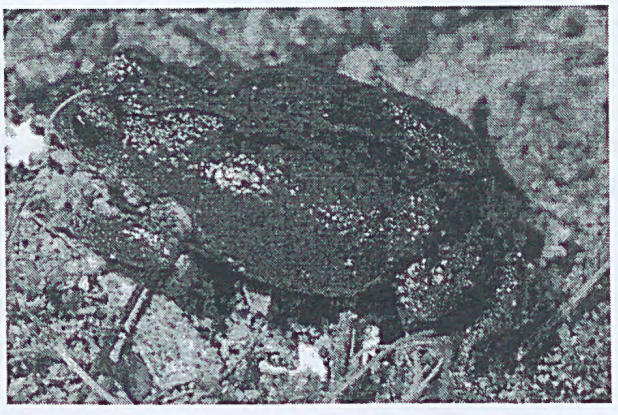
An endangered tree frog is the growling grass frog, *Litoria raniformis*. It is associated with permanent and ephemeral wetlands. It has suffered from habitat fragmentation and particularly from the introduced mosquito fish, gambusia, which prey on its large tadpoles. It is aptly named as it makes a real growling sound. Maurie Lewis joined in the sound making at this stage, as he is familiar with this frog. They call from October till the end of summer, even in the middle of the day. However, they are mostly heard at night time. They call is not continuous, but when played to with a recording, they will start again.
If anybody knows of any populations in the wider region, please let Leigh know as this species is one of the focal points of the survey. Rod Orr mentioned a well-known site at Tower Hill as the nearest he knew of.

Then the Marsh frogs...
These have a wonderful genus name, *Limnodynastes*, Lord of the Marsh.

They include *Limnodynastes tasmaniensis*, the spotted marsh frog, *Limnodynastes peroni,* the striped marsh frog and the well-known and loved pobblebonk or eastern banjo frog, *Limnodynastis dumerili.*

...and the burrowing frogs
Other frogs mentioned, that might be encountered in the region, were the interesting common spade-foot toad, *Neobatrachus sudelli.* It is a burrowing frog and can spend up to seven years underground. They often bury themselves in yabby ponds and have been reported from near Maldon.

...and finally, the very important toadlet, *Pseudophryne bibroni*, Bibron's toadlet (illustrated on the front cover). Below is its back view (photo from the Australian Museum)
This species is another focal point of Leigh's survey, so any information as to the whereabouts of this frog will help Leigh enormously.



Australia does not have any native toads but the term 'toad' or 'toadlet' is applied to some frog species. One characteristic is that they walk instead of hop.
Bibron's toadlet is listed as a threatened species and has been reported form One Tree Hill and the Diamond Hill Historic Reserve (not sure how long ago). The question was asked whether fire is seen as a threatening process for this species and the answer is that nothing is really known about that, but one would think so. Although they can burrow a little, they cannot get away easily. They are also threatened by habitat fragmentation. They breed in autumn and will call from now on.

As with many animals, it is hard to know whether the current low levels of the two frog species targeted by the survey, the growling grass frog and Bibron's toadlet, are due to a real decline or 'just natural fluctuations' in numbers. However, in many regions where they used to be common, they have not been heard for 20 years now, and the verdict is that they are in real decline. Contributing factors to this decline are probably habitat loss and fragmentation, climate change, the appearance of the chytrid fungus, the presence of pesticides and herbicides in our waterways as well as introduced predatory fish, especially the mosquito fish.

Anybody can help in the program. Participants can conduct surveys at any time; advice will be provided regarding the most appropriate time and places to survey. The outcomes will be more accurate maps on current distributions and characteristics of frog's habitats, from which no doubt, better management options will flow.

Thanks, Leigh, for an inspiring presentation.

From the Mailbag
Author: Elaine Mathison

Each month the club receives a number of newsletters and magazines: some by subscription and some in exchange for Whirrakee. These are available from the club library.

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THE VICTORIAN NATURALIST(FNCV)
October 2006

- History Symposium: an extensive report on Victoria's living Natural Capital dealing with decline and replenishment 1800 - 2050, with particular emphasis on the latter aspect in the new millenium.

- A record of the Common Dunnart using artificial habitat in the Kinglake area where forty concrete pavers were laid, with a nesting cavity dug out under each block.

- An understanding of the ecology of the Koo-Wee-Rup Swamp and associated grasslands was gained from historical surveys and soil maps. This was once the largest swamp in the state.

December 2006

- Food plants visited by the Australian Painted Lady butterfly in northern Sydney bushland included herbs, shrubs and one eucalypt tree. All the native flowers utilised were white or cream in colour.

- The Golden Sun Moth is an endangered species until recently found only in six areas in Victoria. A new population has been found in the Craigieburn and Cooper Street Grasslands north of Melbourne.

- Records of the Greater Glider from *The Victorian Naturalist* 1884-2005 have been consolidated into one report including distribution records and observations of the animal's behaviour and feeding.

PARKWATCH(VNPA)
March 2007

"Action to protect our biodiversity" reports on the Grey-crowned Babbler project in various parts of the state, and on the formation of Victoria Naturally, an alliance of eight state environment groups.

"Lincoln National Park, SA" outlines the history, amenities and attractions of a spectacular coastal area.

**This issue also contains a summary of Parks Victoria annual report 2005-06.

* * * * * * *

THE BIRD OBSERVER(BOCA)
February 2007

"Waders say goodbye to Roebuck Bay" reports on the wide variety of birds to be seen in the Broome area, in particular those gathering for their northern migration.

"Birds of Prey" details the steps taken to encourage Peregrine Falcons to nest on the bell tower of Derby Cathedral in UK.

Bird observations include:
- Black Kookaburra
- Back to the Mallee
- Winter on Magnetic Island

* * * * * * *

Also received recently:

*Geelong Naturalist (Geelong FNC)

*The Ballarat Naturalist(Ballarat FNC)

*Castlemaine Naturalist (C'Maine FNC)

*Field Nats News(FNCV)

*Volunteer(Threatened Birds Network)

*The State of Australia's Birds

Vale Shane Grilli

From Diana Collier

Dear All,
I earlier let you all know that Shane had been very ill since last October.
Now, I am sorry that I have really sad news for you. Please pass on to any whom may have known Shane. Shane has been a very loyal, interested and involved person in the best aspects of Reconciliation and discussions since any group like this one has begun, such as ANTaR.
He has been in the Alfred Hospital since last October, but seemed to be better and was removed from the ICU about ten days ago, and his daughter, Demi (many of you know her too), but suffered a relapse and then recovered. Demi was being finely instructed as how to care for him while he awaited a replacement heart. Last Friday he had a massive stroke. Demi went straight up to Melbourne, to the Alfred, where her brother was also called. But Shane died on Saturday evening.
Those who knew him, will very much miss him. He was very politically knowledgable and aware. He had travelled with Aboriginal groups quite a lot over Victoria, South Australia and Central Australia, with a partner. More recently, when well, he escorted patients from Inglewood to the Bendigo Hospital and kept contact with housebound people
He was an enthusiastic member of one of the earlier discussion groups at Bendigo U3A, and was until his health prevented it, a member of the Bendigo CAA (now OXFAM) and of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club.

More letters...

Our members are always writing letters to council, politicians and organizations to get a point across. Some get in the newspaper, some don't. Some get an answer, some don't. We print a sample of these for your information, but many more are written. If you have recently written a letter that expresses an opinion about conservation issues, send it in, so other people can see it too.

Mr John Thwaites
Minister of Environment and Water
1 Treasury Place
Melbourne Vic. 3000

Dear Mr Thwaites,

I refer to a letter I wrote to you 29-11-06 regarding a letter I received from Ken King, Executive Director Regional Services, Department of Sustainability and Environment, in which he addressed all the issues I raised in a letter I wrote to you 21-08-06, except one. The issue not addressed was the one I have raised with you in letters of 30-11-04, 10-12-04, 28-1-05 and again on 21-08-06. The issue is the fact that the box-ironbark forest, which extends in broken remnants north of the Great Dividing Range in Victoria from near The Grampians to near Wodonga, does not require fuel-reduction burning because, unlike other forest types adjacent to it, it is fire-retardant rather than fire prone, and I asked you to cease burning in the box-ironbark forests.

In response to my letter to you of 29-11-06, Sal from the Department of Sustainability and Environment rang me at 9.05am on 20-12-06 and asked me if I would be available to meet with Chris Halpin at the DSE offices in Epsom at 10am on Friday 22-12-06 to discuss this letter. As requested, I, along with Dr Bill Holsworth and Rod Orr, Latrobe University, Bendigo lecturer, attended and met with Mr Halpin in the hope we could have a meaningful discussion on the issue.

As it transpired, Mr Halpin seemed to have a closed mind on the subject, saying that he

disagreed with our belief. Dr Holsworth said that the only fire history the DSE had in the box-ironbark forests has been burn-offs deliberately lit by the DSE.

On the burn-off issue, the Department of Sustainability and Environment have requested Latrobe University Bendigo to burn a fire-break in an area of box-ironbark owned by the university. This area is used in teaching students about this type of forest. Dr Sabine Wilkens, who has lectured at the university for eighteen years, informed me that there has not been a fire in the university-owned forest in all the time she has worked here. This is further proof that there is no need for the DSE to torch this type of forest.

Mr Halpin has my telephone number, and he said he would contact me on some of the issues we raised with him. To date I have not received contact from him, even though on January 30 I left a message at the Epsom offices for him to ring me back. A lady called Elizabeth took my message.

Mr Thwaites, I again appeal to you to cease burning the box-ironbark forest, because many people who have lived in and around it for many years, and know it intimately, can understand that burning is not necessary. The evidence I have sent you in previous years, and Dr Wilkens' assertion that the university's section has not been affected by fire for eighteen years is more than enough proof for you to decide to take this step.

Yours Sincerely,

Clive Fisher.

Editor's note: I still don't know exactly <u>where</u> the burn at LTUB will take place but it is planned for the semester break, weather permitting, of course.

Diary

The General, Bird Observers Group and Fauna Study Group meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

General Meetings

Wednesday, April 11 **7.30pm**
The speaker for the night will be Ben Goonan 'Roadsides and the conservation of their natural values'

Excursion

The next excursion will be on Saturday, April 14, to the Barmah Forest.
See page 3 of this edition for details.
Conact Richard Goonan if you plan to attend (0423418815)

Fauna Group

This group meets (in the clubrooms) on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7.30pm.

If you intend to come to the next meeting, please check with the organisers (see inside front cover) to see if one is planned for April being ANZAC Day).

Fauna Excursions

Every Friday morning starting at around 9 to 9:30, the Fauna Group inspects nest boxes in the Spring Gully area. The excursions are led by Maurie Lewis, 16 Vains St. Golden Square. Phone 0407 427 179 or 5442 1813. Phone Maurie to confirm exact departure times and location. If you don't phone but go directly to Maurie's house and find nobody at the house between 9 and 9:30 then the excursion is not on.

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.

W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals. It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Sustainability and Environment.
Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433.

New Edition of Box Ironbark CD The new edition of 'Plants and Animals of the Box-Ironbark Area of Central Victoria' is still available at the usual price of $ 50
....and **Wildlife of the Box Ironbark Country by Chris Tzaros** is also still available at $ 30.-.

Please contact Bill Holsworth if you are interested in purchasing one of these.

Bendigo Field Naturalists on the web

Any comments about the site are most welcome http://communitysites.impulse.net.au/bendigofieldnaturalists/fnats.html

An interesting seminar series

The Centre of Environmental Management (University of Ballarat, Mt Helen Campus) in conjunction with DSE present a varied and interesting seminar program. Details will be supplied as they come to hand. Some topics are TBA (to be advised) but some people may know the speaker and what their topic will be already.
The contact person is S.K. Florentine and he can be reached at s.florentine@ballarat.edu.au or by Phone on 5327 9231.

27 April, speaker: Graeme Coulson
Topic: 'Exploding kangaroos' (see page 3)

11 May, speaker: Fleur Maidment
Topic: TBA

20 July, speaker: Professor Rod Keenan
Topic: Quantifying forest ecosystem services: policy issues and methodological challenges

24 August, speaker: Dr David Cameron
Topic: The conservation status of Victorian Flora: the recent IUCN based review and case studies